

MACBITER

Don't look back

Never one to shy away from a conspiracy theory, MacBiter speculates on why the Intel Macs will put long-time Apple owners out in the cold

I can honestly say that, in a world stuffed full of mediocre PCs, 100 per cent of my close friends use Macs. But I also have to add that both of them are tightwads, and even though I am careful to maintain an ownership posture well behind the leading edge, they are even further in arrears than me. One has just made it to G4 status – only two generations behind the current wide boys – while the other grinds along on a 300MHz G3 PowerBook running OS 9.

So while I am only just now contemplating adding AirPort to my system and enjoying what others have been enjoying for two years – wireless networking – one of these chaps has no networking at all and the other is still trying to do it with LocalTalk. Neither appears to care much.

TOO TIGHT TO MENTION

It is, as I said, mainly close-fistedness that accounts for this antique computing strategy. And both of these bastards always come to me to straighten out any problems that arise. The man with the PowerBook wished recently to create a PDF for web downloading purposes, his original being in an old form of QuarkXPress. As he won't shell out for Acrobat (let alone a new version of Quark, since that would mean buying an OS X computer), this means taking the old route of making a PostScript file from Quark, then giving it to me on a Zip for translation via Preview into a PDF. I won't go into the nightmare that ensued, but I accomplished it in the end, though the resulting PDF was about 12MB in size while the original was less than one – a fair download even for those equipped with broadband, and an impossible one for dial-up.

The irony is that this man was preparing to buy a new Mac until quite recently. He had his eye on a 15" G4 PowerBook – which would do everything he wanted – but then he heard of the switch to Intel. He decided to hang around for the new generation, and when the MacBook was announced last month he journeyed to London to buy one at the Apple Store.

He was in the process of extracting his debit card from his wallet (the superglue made this difficult) when he gathered from the assistant that although he would easily be able to transfer documents and applications from the old PowerBook to the new, he wouldn't be able to run any of them since all these apps and docs are OS 9-compatible.

While on my (G4) version of OS X they will run under Classic mode, on the shiny new Intel Macs (with no Classic) they will not run at all. His MacBook purchase would have to include new versions of Microsoft Office, Photoshop and QuarkXPress – another fifteen hundred quid, making a total

was avoided by the use of the Classic emulation. But with the coming of Intel, this legacy software was dumped, with the result that anybody still using OS 9 applications – there are thousands of us – has a double disincentive to upgrade to an Intel Mac before we absolutely have to. That includes me. What do I use? Quark, Photoshop, Illustrator and all those minor games and utilities I've been enjoying for years. All would go phut if I upgraded.

Why did Apple do this? There are a few candidate reasons. One is that to signal a 'brand new day' and remove all stigma of the (IBM) past as soon as possible, Apple is cutting itself off from its roots, like

better than the old emulators because both operating systems use the same processor family.

BREAKING WINDOWS

Who would want to do this? Not many, it's true. However, Apple would like to see an environment grow up in which both Windows and OS X run on Intel Macs. This would confuse the issue, almost exclusively to the benefit of Apple. When copies of OS X that run on Windows boxes appear – as they will, whether officially released by Apple or not – customers of both camps will be faced with the conundrum: which OS do I prefer?

Former Apple CEO Gil Amelio made the same point: Apple should port OS X to all Intel computers and sell it head-to-head with Windows. It's been noticeable for years that most former Apple CEOs get their best ideas after they've left the company (John Sculley: "Not switching to Intel was the worst move I ever made"), and I have to say I was no big fan of Amelio's brief reign over what looked then like a thoroughly doomed company (his only contribution to original computer thinking being the coining of the term 'middleware' which nobody, especially Amelio, has ever been able to explain).

But here he's said what has until now been unsayable: if Apple's OS X went head to head with Windows for the same Intel desktops – and the playing field was level, which at the moment it certainly isn't – then OS X would win, given time. The iPod has bought Apple plenty of time, whereas my friends tell me the next big iteration of the World's Worst Desktop is still some years away. As Hitler said on the eve of the invasion of Russia: "We only have to kick in the door and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down."

He was wrong, as it turned out, but only just. ☹



purchase of three grand in all. Once apprised of this unpleasant fact, my friend cancelled the sale and walked out of the Apple Store no poorer than he walked in – but still with a creaky old computer.

HOOKED ON CLASSIC

I find it hard to blame him. A dozen years ago, when Apple last pulled off a migration of this sort, there were very few applications that stopped running with the switch of processor. They didn't take full advantage of the new architecture, but we could live with that. Over time, one acquired 'native' (that is, PowerPC-optimised) versions of most programs, and the catharsis of a mass dumping of valued old apps was avoided.

Even with the advent of the all-new OS X, the executioner's axe

an arriviste moving out of the neighbourhood where he grew up.

It is also possible that it couldn't give a flying f*** about the people who already own Macs – especially older Macs – and is convinced enough new business will come along to take up the slack. The third possible reason is that it wants to keep its emulation space for Windows.

You may not have noticed, but Windows-on-the-Mac has made a comeback. The various third-party emulators that used to exist in order to provide this off-the-wall (but occasionally useful) capacity have dropped out of sight, but Apple itself has recently announced just such a package. Once installed, a double-click takes you into XP (or whatever). When you've finished, there's the OS X desktop. It works